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AMERICAN

SQUARE DANCE GROUP

MARGOT MAYO
LEADER

"PROMENADE"



Official organ of the American Square-Dance Group.
"The purpose of the American Square-Dance Group shall be to make available those rich stores of native dance, music, drama and general Americana which together comprise American folk-culture; to conduct such activities without regard for race, creed, color or social position; to cooperate with those who hold similar views."

A S*D G Constitution

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Letters From Alan

It is hardly fair to Alan to include these excerpts from hurriedly dashed off letters. But many people have asked about him, and I think it might be interesting to follow a folk-lore enthusiast in his first attempts to collect material from the "natives". - - - - -

"Folk song research down here hasn't rendered too much except from the old sharecropper in town who sang 'Sow on the Mountain and Reap in the Valley'....I asked him where he heard the song, and he said he heard it on the radio. Square dances are also rare.

"It's really pitiful to see the way the people live down here..it's hard to believe how poor people can be.

"The words 'folk song' may seem innocent to city people, but they surely can frighten the wits out of a banjo picker down here. It's absolutely necessary to forget that you're out in quest of songs before you can win over the negro down here. If you ask, 'Do you know a folk song?', he's most likely to open his eyes wide, show his shining teeth, and say, 'No, sir, I don't reckon I ever heard one.' But if you ask him if he ever heard a fellow pick 'John Henry' on a banjo, he'll open right up. They don't seem to remember very much until you take out your banjo and hit off 'Buffalo Gals' or some other well-known tune. A banjo picker is never lacking in admirers.. the moment he sits down and picks away and lets his voice bellow all holler, the others come running from all directions. But.. the average folk here cling to the modern generation swing.. and you can start them off with 'Chattanooga Choo Choo' much more easily. It hurts plenty to find most of the folk music here has almost completely gone astray. The ditch digger wails a modern love song, the road builder driving stakes, prefers the ten cent blues. Most folks who do sing and play the old songs live too far out of town, and are too poor to replace broken strings, etc.

"Playing a guitar, mandolin, or banjo (these are by far the most common) is nothing out of the ordinary according to one negro friend I picked up. He said there is not one negro alive who does not want to play an instrument and sing all the songs but, 'Some can and others just Jan't'.

"I inquired about revivals and jubilee singing and was told that these can be found anywhere in this neighborhood... but you never know when it happens until you run into it. I did notice that when two fellows work together one seemed to sing some words and the other would shout something in response. I asked one of these Negro workers who was sitting down eating his lunch and he immediately got up, holding his sandwich in his big muddy hand... he just looked at me surprised and said "Huh?" When I assured him I was just curious, he smiled, bit off another hunk of what seemed to be a cheese sandwich, and told me in a very complex manner, with an intense enthusiasm, that one man did work that required the cooperation of another man. When they were alone for a moment, each would think of a short verse of one line like "I gotta—" "It's all—" The first man would sing these words and pause, and the other man would fill in the blank with some object he wants, sees, or thinks of. Then, usually after one verse, they separate to prepare something for the job, such as bricklaying, emptying wheelbarrows of dirt, etc. where one hands the other a brick and the second lays it in the cement, or where one comes back pushing the wheelbarrow and dumps its contents while the others spread out the stuff. On the second trip they sing another verse and so on and on. Sometimes, when several "teams" are working there are many different songs going on at the same time. One of the favorites was about my "Beautiful honey, Gonna buy you shoes, gonna dress you in silk, gonna get mighty happy, and if you don't kiss me, gonna feel mighty blue," the underlined words are the improvised responses. Often one man in the crew sings the first word and the whole mob comes in on the shout, providing it's a well-established song.

"All of which leads me to believe that the less I look for folk songs hereabouts, the more time I will have for other things. There are several fellows here at my quarters who are from Tennessee, Kentucky, etc. One chap who lives between the Virginia and Ohio rivers has a mother who has sung to him "One Morning in May" (a variant with a tune that differs from the J.J. Niles version.)

"Yesterday in our barracks some Negroes were scraping our windows to get the paint off... so Alan took out his banjo and started in on "Old Joe Clark" then "John Henry"... well, the result is the following song, although it wasn't as easy as it sounds! One old fellow stopped his work and let out a horse-laugh that would have pleased any dentist. He slapped his sides, then his knees and showed all his teeth, cackling loudly.... I stopped and asked him if he played a banjo... he shook his head, but told me where I could find several banjo-pickers about ten miles out of town. He said his wife could play anything you put in her hands and was a marvel at the "accordum." He sang, or rather recited a stanza of "Buffalo Gals," to the title of "Pretty Sally Ann."

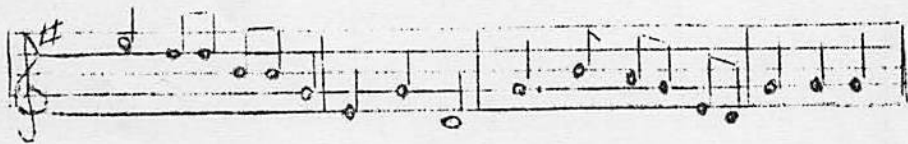
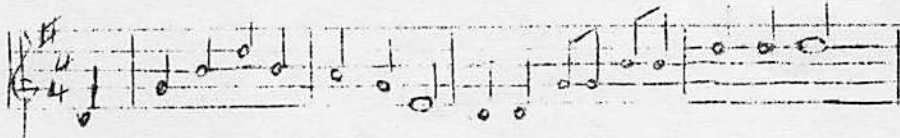
Pretty Sally Ann wontcha ride with me
 'Cause you are my honey.
 If the car stops on a hill
 I won't git out to crank it
 Pretty Sally Ann I won't git out
 So you better bring along your blanket.

But now that's over and I guess I'll continue to look for folk songs. Lord knows there are plenty of ditch diggers, window scrapers, cementers, paper hangers, pile drivers etc. in these parts.

Well, keep the Group a-moving... honest to gosh, from where I can see, the members of our Group don't know how fortunate they are to be in a group that stands for so open a mind as the ASDG....gently remind....

I WANT A PRETTY GAL FOR MY OWN

(collected by Alan Swartz in Alabama. The chap who sang the song came originally from Tenn. but had lived for several years in Kentucky)



- 1) Oh, you got a pretty gal, I got none
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
I want a pretty gal for my own
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
- 2) Oh, I whistled to my dog and I threw him a bone
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
Sent him to fetch me a pretty gal home
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
- 3) He took his bone and went on past
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
Can't remember when I seen him last
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
- 4) I went hunting and soon I spied
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
My old hound dog by a pretty gal's side
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
- 5) I says "dog why ain't you home?"
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low
Says he, "I want that pretty gal for my own"
Ting tang Willie with a whistle low

ROUND DANCE
(from Quarryville, N.Y.)

formation: square set

music: any lively tune such as "Garry Owen"

calls: Circle eight hands round
Head lady and opposite gent forward and back
Forward and cross over
Double chassez, ladies inside
Double chassez, gents inside
Head lady and opposite gent forward and back
Forward and cross over

chorus: All eight balance and swing
Allemande left and promenade the ring

ending: All eight balance and all eight swing
Allemande left, grand chain 'round the ring

description: All join hands and circle once around to the left, stopping in original positions. The first lady and third gent move forward four steps, and backward to place. They move forward across the set and exchange places, so that there are two ladies in the third position and two gents in the first couple's place. The two ladies face each other, join hands in skating position and slide across the set to the first couple's place, while the two gents move across the set, the first gent to the left of the two ladies and the third gent to the right. On reaching the opposite side of the set each gent continues moving in the direction he is facing so that on the return trip they have changed sides, and on reaching the head couple's place each gent has described what amounts to a complete circle. The first gent's circle being in a clockwise direction, the third's in a counterclockwise direction. The double chassez is repeated with the gents performing the part described for the ladies and vice versa. Head lady and opposite gent forward and back and forward, each returning to original position in the set. The chorus is the same as described for the other dance in this issue. Each lady in the set becomes active in turn, so that the whole dance is performed four times before the ending chorus.



RIGHT HAND OVER

(from Quarryville, N.Y.)

formation: square set

music: any square dance tune, like "White Cockade".

calls: Honor your partners and honor your corners
All join hands and circle left

Head couple out to the right
And circle left with all your might
Right hand to your opposite
Back with the left
Right hand to your partner
Back with the left
Circle four as you did before
Right and left and on to the next

chorus: Balance all
Allemande left
Promenade all

finale chorus: Balance all, allemande left and grand chain around
Honor partners all.

description: there is nothing difficult about following these calls. When the head couple circles four with the second couple they finish with the second couple in place and the head couple facing them in the center of the set. Each dancer joins right hands with the dancer facing him and each changes place, returning with the left hands joined. The call "right and left" means that the two couples dancing together advance, passing each other with the ladies moving between the gents, and both couples turn around with the gents keeping their partners always on their right-hand sides. Both couples return in the same manner. The active couple continues moving and joins hands with the next couple. The figures are repeated with each couple and the head couple returns to original position in the set. All the couples in the set then swing (balance) and each gent turns to his corner lady, the lady on his left, joins left hand with her left and turning her once around so that all partners are now facing each other. Every lady then places her left hand on the right shoulder of her partner and each gent places his right arm around the waist of his partner, and all couples promenade, or walk, around the set in a counterclockwise direction. In the final chorus, after the allemande left, each gent faces his lady and all partners join right hands, passing by and joining left hands with the next dancer and so on, alternating hands until all dancers reach original positions in the set. Each couple in the set are active in turn.



Notes of Interest

Recently Manny, plus the American Square Dance Group Orchestra, conducted by Frank Novak, made a short wave broadcast to South America. The fifteen minute program was part of the National Broadcasting Company's program of intercultural exchange to South America.

The American Square Dance Group has started a song group which meets on Sunday afternoons at Margo's house. The purpose of this division is to learn as many of the different types of American folk songs as possible, and so far we have tackled white spirituals, Negro spirituals, and a few work songs. After rehearsing, we play recordings of American folk songs, so that we may hear how others sing them. And also gain a knowledge of the vast number of recordings which have been released in the past few years.

GOODEE---our last album for Decca has been released. This album contains three quadrilles (twelve inch records) with a descriptive booklet explaining the figures.



By the way, be sure, when you buy our albums, that each set has its descriptive booklet. One batch was sent out to dealers without the booklets. If yours is missing better get in touch with Decca.

The demonstrating group of the ASDG put on a sort of a mass dance at a benefit on March 5th, held at the Lost Battalion Hall in Queens. The program was called "Buy a Bomber", and when we saw the enormous crowd that we had to lead in square dancing we were a little dismayed. However, in spite of the tremendous number of people who got up to join us in a running set, the folks seemed to enjoy it. Margot thought the "wind Up the Ball Of Yarn Figure" would never end, and before she got it wound and unwound she felt like a rundown engine pulling one of those mile-long freight trains one sees in the country.

The ASDG has conducted two evenings of square dances for the U.S.A.C. at the Jewish Welfare Board Clubhouse at 1 E. 65th Street. The members of the group enjoyed these evenings tremendously and are anticipating similar evenings in the future.

Please excuse the lateness of this issue, but it was due to circumstances beyond our control. Our mimeograph machine broke down.

